Canada's Board of Commerce

The Business Man's Court

How It Can Help In Improving
Trade Conditions

Important and Interesting to the
Consumer, Retailer, Wholesaler and Manufacturer

Toronto, December 2nd, 1919

No. 4, Issued by the
Canadian Wholesale Grocers' Association

FOREWORD

At a Convention of the Ontario Section of the Canadian Wholesale Grocers' Association held in Toronto December 2nd, 1919, at the King Edward Hotel, an address was given by one of the members, and as it is the intention of the Canadian Wholesale Grocers' Association to carry on more or less of propaganda work in the way of educating those engaged in commercial pursuits, and also to protect, as far as possible, the legitimate and well recognized channels of distribution, both wholesale and retail, and to fight against the demoralizing inroads that are being attempted by schemers, promoters, and so on, actuated entirely by selfish motives, no doubt the address will be interesting.

The members of the Canadian Wholesale Grocers' Association are working along broad lines for the benefit and uplifting of the Dominion of Canada as a whole. Selfish schemes calculated to disrupt the regular channels of business may be all right for the promoters of same, but the contention of the trade is that **we must look at things from a national standpoint, and any interference with the regular channels of business, viz., from the manufacturer to the wholesaler, from the wholesaler to the retailer, and from the retailer to the consumer—will not only demoralize the trade of the manufacturer, wholesaler, and retailer, but that the consumer will not be as well off in the long run.**

Exceptional insight into economic conditions is absolutely necessary.

To determine what is and what is not prejudicial to the interests of the country as a whole requires very exceptional insight into economic conditions and the nature of commercial transactions.

Before we had a Board of Commerce, such as we have now in Canada—as the late Mr. Justice Cave once remarked—**"Judges are more to be trusted as interpreters of the law than as expounders of what is called public policy."**

The condition of trade must necessarily be a policy that is best for the country as a whole, and undoubtedly this matter will be perfectly safe in the hands of the Board of Commerce of Canada.

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upon application to
A. C. PYKE, Sec. C. W. G. A.,
509 Board of Trade Bldg., Toronto.

After presentation of the address herein the following resolution was unanimously carried:—

The members of the Ontario Section of the Canadian Wholesale Grocers' Association, in convention at Toronto, December 2nd, 1919, heartily endorse the action of the Federal Government for introducing and passing the Acts cited as "The Board of Commerce" and "Combines and Fair Prices" Acts of 1919, which, in the opinion of the trade, is the most advanced legislation enacted by the Federal Government in the past twenty years.

That we are pleased also with the appointment to the personnel of the Board and have every confidence in their ability for sound and fair reasonings in the adjustment of trade difficulties and the adoption of findings, rules, or regulations as a moral uplift to those engaged in mercantile pursuits, and as a protection to the consumer.

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To the Members of the Trade:

Remember, we have at last a Board of Commerce, "a commission removed from political or class influence," a commission that will not deal with business problems as lawyers or judges would, but a commission that will deal with business problems as honest business men would. We have such a tribunal now. We worked for it year after year, and with it we should have no difficulty in settling business problems that have been burning questions for years back.

Before the advent of the Board of Commerce, the only way we could settle questions of trade ethics was through the courts—and then it frequently happened, as is happening now in the States, that the courts were and are now inclined to transcend the limits of their jurisdiction in an attempt to manage the ethical in business, and judgments, even when the facts and conditions were identical, were not always the same.

In the past we have been inclined to draw too many general conclusions instead of trying to work out some concrete principle in business.

We should give specific reasons and logical, forceful argument for our contention that it is better for the upbuilding of the country as a whole, that certain fixed

principles should be established in business, principles that are clearly manifest to the minds of most of us who are engaged in the distributing business.

We can, from this time forward, know where we are at.

As Mr. O'Connor said to us in Ottawa (as most of you will remember): "Combinations which are in the interests of those who make them, without being to the general detriment of the public—when made by business men, are now as lawful as combinations made by workmen for their own mutual protection."

He told you some good, sound, common horse sense when he said: "Combinations which are not injurious to the public are lawful—and that what is **lawful,** or what **some** people might think **unlawful,** would be **left to the sole determination of the Board of Commerce, and that no proceedings can be had under the criminal law against any combination (or any manufacturer) by reason of its being such without leave** of the Board of Commerce which has the first right to prohibit.

The Board of Commerce of Canada is the most advanced legislation Canada ever had. It is superior to that of any other country in the world, and it is a pleasure to see Canada lead in this respect, instead of tagging on to the coat-tail of some other country.

We may venture to say, if it were not for the pull of certain interests before now, other countries would have had a commission just such as we have in Canada. Certain interests in Canada did not want this Board of Commerce; they fought secretly and powerfully to prevent it; but don't you forget it—that what is right and best will prevail in the end.

Certain interests fought tooth and nail to prevent Mr. O'Connor's appointment. They feared his outspoken criticisms. They did not want investigation. **We always courted it.** Even today many of the papers criticize adversely the Board of Commerce and

its members, but, believe me, the people are getting wiser as they get older, and we are going to have a new order of things. You can't pull the wool over the eyes of the Board of Commerce, and if any one attempts it they will find their mistake. The Board says it will proceed slowly with its findings because they know they have enemies. We know they have—one only needs to read some of the papers to see that.

The Hamilton papers and some Toronto and outside papers have given the Board praise, but many dailies and weeklies have done everything they could do to stir up public opinion against the Board. So far such efforts have had no effect on the public mind, and am confident as the Board continues its investigations and makes its findings, its rules and regulations, the Board will prove to be the popular institution for the business men of this country, who put ideals in business ahead of money grabbing.

Remember, it is not the function of Canada's Board of Commerce to wreck business.

Gentlemen, we now have an opportunity to improve the character and calling of our business—we must try and purify the channels of trade and commerce from one end of this country to the other. We have nothing to dread, and by this means we will become in name, as well as in fact, honored merchants of Canada.

There must be in any effort we make and in which we are about to undertake in purifying the channels of trade, some **underlying principles upon which we want to build.** They must be of such a character that the foundation is sound, honorable, logical and solid.

First, then, to a great extent, our success depends upon **unity** and **continuity.**

We must adopt the principle that a full observance of business morality on our part, and also a desire to expose the want of business morality on the part of some one else, even if it be one of our members, is a necessary part of our structure.

We must not hesitate or draw back through fear of losing business, or personal friendship—we must have a little business courage.

All these things will enter largely into the success of our efforts and the success of our objective.

Remember, the rulings of the Board of Commerce will be common sense and justice—it is the law **they** will follow in their findings.

We as wholesalers stand between the manufacturer and the ultimate consumer. We know what it costs to do business—we know we are the most economical means of distribution for the manufacturers in many lines of goods, not all, of course, and we have a perfect right to say what margin we need and is necessary for handling any manufacturer's goods who prefers to reach the ultimate consumer through our distributing machinery. We must, however, be fair, sound and reasonable at all times.

If a certain kind of unfair competition is going to destroy our business or impair our efficiency or increase our expenses of doing business, we have a right to protest to the Board of Commerce, particularly in view of the fact that if these piratical and unfair methods are not checked, the consumer in the long run will be worse off.

As things and conditions are at the present time, they are tending to monopoly, and that kind of monopoly is not good for the upbuilding of the country as a whole. In the long run it is not good for the consumer, retailer, wholesaler or manufacturer—it is only good for the monopolist.

We must speak candidly and fearlessly. Even if the press do try to get back at us; even if they do make an effort to ridicule us and minimize our efforts. It has been difficult to get them to take up our standard.

Let us, therefore, do a little propaganda work on our own hook. We have wonderful avenues of distri-

bution, the greatest in the world. Our circulation is Dominion wide. In ten days, by means of our army of salesmen, we can personally distribute our propaganda from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

We have been asleep at the switch. We have been kidding ourselves by the belief that in some mysterious way things would come all right without our effort. They have **not** been coming all right **and you all know it.**

The world is uneasy.

It is not getting better and will not, if we don't take off our coats and fight for what is right in business. This is just as important as the "forward movement." The whole object of the "forward movement" is to get people to practice what has been preached. The selfish interests have got a grip on this country and it is developing into a strangle hold. Can't you see it? Have you not seen it developing—while you have been taking it easy? Picture to yourselves the future of Canada in 25 years, if we don't rouse ourselves. Read the hand-writing on the wall—"weighed in the balance and found wanting." Don't wait until it is too late. Let us put ideals before dollars and cents.

Well, gentlemen, remember this, if our self-starters are a bit rusty, that it requires mental effort to take the initiative, and that there never was any real and lasting benefit come to those who take life so easy that they prefer to let things drift.

To those of us in the wholesale grocery business, we should make it our ideal to put our business and our methods on a higher plane, even if, in making the effort, we are subject to brick-bats thrown by the selfish and ignorant. Let us never weary in well doing; we are gradually making progress.

Let us leave an inheritance to the generation now growing up that will be a credit to the nation. We don't want the word **"selfish"** written on our tombstones.